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ABSTRACT

The primary cause of difficulties in the implementation phase of planned change in business organizations is the lack of a parallel communication plan to facilitate the changes implied by new strategy. Planners usually concentrate on content (the strategy itself) to the neglect of process (how the strategy should be developed and implemented). Some popular rational strategic management models are of little practical value unless they are supported by a communication strategy that facilitates both the development and implementation of corporate strategy. Successful implementation of all kinds of planned change is facilitated when change agents employ holistic approaches that utilize an integrated model which incorporates three additional perspectives on organizational communication and behavior: human resources, cultural/symbolic, and political. To assure that communication channels are sufficient, an organization should develop a communication plan that is proactive in design rather than reactive. (Twenty-nine footnotes and five figures of data are included.) (KEH)

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PLANNING STRATEGICALLY FOR COMMUNICATION--A HOLISTIC APPROACH

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Since the early 1970's American Business organizations have been expending large amounts of time and money to engage in strategic planning. During my review of the literature in the areas of organizational communication and behavior for my recently-published textbook I discovered that organizations were immensely more successful in developing highly-rational and technically-sophisticated strategic plans than they were in implementing them. My review of the literature and my own field research led me to conclude that one primary cause of "failure to implement" is the lack of a parallel communication plan to facilitate the changes implied by new strategy.

In a nutshell, my argument is that strategic planning has been less successful than it could be because planners usually concentrate on content (the strategy itself) to the neglect of process (how the strategy should be developed and implemented). With regard to any planned change program, the terms "implementation" and "communication" are nearly synonymous,[1] as are "plan" and "planned change.[2]" Almost without exception, planning--strategic, long-range, or operational--implies organizational change. The kernel in my nutshell is that successful implementation of strategic plans and other forms of planned change requires a parallel communication strategy.

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My argument unfolds like this:

1. Strategic planning may be the ultimate extension of rationalism as applied to behavior in organizations, but exclusively rational approaches to planning seldom succeed.
2. Successful implementation of strategic plans requires a parallel communication strategy.
3. Successful implementation of all kinds of planned change is facilitated by employing an integrated, holistic approach that utilizes four perspectives on organizational communication and behavior: human resources, cultural/symbolic, and political, as well as rational.[3]

The rational perspective on communication and behavior is based on a number of assumptions about organizational life. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal[4] identify seven of these assumptions, two of which are most relevant to our discussion:

1. For any organization, there is a structure appropriate to the environment, the technology, and the participants.
2. Organizations work most effectively when environmental turbulence and the personal preferences of participants are constrained by norms of rationality.

These two assumptions argue for a contingency approach to organizational structure. The first asserts that through careful internal analysis and environmental scanning, management can align structure with the organization's environment, technology and membership. The second assumption tells us <u>why</u> this should be done; that is, to employ "norms of rationality" to reduce the effects of environmental changes and to prevent people from doing whatever they like.

Now, why do I call strategic planning "the ultimate extension of rationalism?" Because strategic planners accept all the premises of contingency theories of organizational structure and then convert them into numbers. And, of course, there's nothing more rational than quantitative data! Yes, by taking measures of market variables, environmental changes, competitors' activities, evolving technologies, and human resource capabilities one can run sophisticated computer simulations of alternative scenarios and strategic planning models, and then, going by the numbers, select the best model. Now, that's rational.[5]

But, your rationally-induced euphoria will be cut short by the last half of my first point: "Exclusively rational approaches to planning seldom succeed." Hence the next step in my argument: "Successful implementation of strategic plans requires a parallel communication strategy." Capelle, in his 1979 book, Changing Human Systems,[6] laments the lack of attention to implementation that produces a dismal 90% failure rate for programs of planned change. Most of his discussion of implementation focuses on communication concepts like participation, upward communication, and information-sharing. Similarly, Shatshat and Shin (1981) hold that communication is an essential key to successful strategic planning.[7] They concur with other theorists who contend that there can be no strategy formulation without communication. Seiler and Said (1983) pursued the question: "Why aren't strategic plans implemented through operational budgets?" They analyzed data gathered from profit managers in sixty-eight large industrial corporations. One fact stood out clearly in their research: translation of plans into budgets requires a sound communication system.

They comment:

> The research effort reported here indicates that communication of the strategic plan, whether through written memoranda or through discussions, interpretations, and frequent meetings, could be the most critical factor leading to acceptance of the strategic plan by operating management as a basis for operational budgets.... One is led to surmise that profit managers could overcome the other planning weaknesses if the communication channels were sufficient and there were adequate avenues to insure that any questions are answered and inconsistencies are resolved (p. 20).[8]

One way to assure that communication channels are sufficient is to use a strategic planning process to develop a communication plan for implementing corporate strategy. Such communication plans are <u>proactive</u> in design rather than <u>reactive</u>. For example, keeping employees well-informed about anticipated personnel decisions would be proactive, but it would be reactive to crank out memos and call emergency meetings after local news headlines trumpet something like "Mass Layoffs at Merged Bank." Our discussion of strategic planning for communication begins with a review of a traditional strategic management model and an explanation of the strategic communication plan developed at Honeywell Corporation. Once this groundwork has been laid, I'll get more specific about the role of communication in holistic approaches to implementing planned change.

I selected Pearce's (1981) strategic management model[9] to illustrate the process of planned change because it is representative and not unnecessarily complicated. Notice in your Figure 1 that the item at the top is "company mission." Mission statements identify an organization's scope of operations in product, service and market/clientele terms. Pearce describes a mission

statement as "an enduring statement of company intent" (p. 40), that "reflects the values and priorities of the strategic decision makers" (p. 41).

If you had been on the scene when a company like Eastman Kodak was planning a strategy, your next step after developing a mission statement would have been to gather data. Here you would engage in environmental scanning to gather data about Kodak's task environment. A company profile emerges from an internal analysis. You would seek data concerning Kodak's potential to perform by examining the quantity and quality of human and material resources and Kodak's strengths and weaknesses. After assessing Kodak's strengths and weaknesses and inventorying its resources, you should have the data needed to answer the question, What is possible?", with respect to "What is desired?" (in terms of Kodak's mission statement). You are also now prepared to participate in "interactive opportunity analysis."

By comparing Kodak's company profile with conclusions that emerge from environmental scanning, you begin to perceive how the two can interact to yield opportunities (options for your management team to consider). You place your conclusions about Kodak's task environment alongside your conclusions about strengths and weaknesses and look for connections that identify opportunities.

Strategic-choice decision making involves evaluating each opportunity option in terms of its consistency with the mission statement. The options that survive generate long-term and annual objectives, which together comprise the grand strategy (in the Miles and Snow sense of a general stance that implies an array of major actions).[10]

For Kodak, long-term objectives might include expanding its market share and improving profit margin. Annual objectives become benchmarks along the way to achieving long-term objectives. Grand strategy can consist of a Miles and Snow strategic type (defender, analyzer, or prospector).

After goals and grand strategy are in place, your next step is to develop the operational strategies that, if successful, will bring about implementation. When you move into implementation, all the barriers and processes surrounding organizational change come into play. Diane McNeil-Emo will discuss these. What you need is a strategic plan for communication to support implementation of the grand strategy. Keith Jackson will describe Xerox's communication strategy which is based, in part, on the model developed at Honeywell Corporation. Let's look at the Honeywell model together.

Policy

The heart of Honeywell's communication policy is that it must be proactive rather than reactive. Communication in most large companies is reactive. It is seen as a process of responding to what has already happened.

Honeywell management believes that people have a need to know plans and information not after they have happened but as early as possible without compromising proprietary and security needs. To give employees the information they need, Honeywell treats employee communication not as an afterthought but as a vital part of the business planning process. This means that employee communication must be a planned process that can be folded into Honeywell's other business and human resource plans to enhance their success.

Organization Assessment

The next step in the Honeywell model is called Organization Assessment. The contents of the policy, including assumptions and guidelines, are givens reflecting corporate intentions. How those are translated into actions needs to be determined by a careful assessment of plans and problems. Your entire communication plan must flow from a careful and realistic assessment of the reality of your own organization.

Fundamental Assumptions

Every plan or strategy is based on a set of "fundamental assumptions," which involve our beliefs about good communication practice and are embedded in a variety of company statements about effective communication. Some examples are (1) "Better-informed employees are more productive;" and (2) "If people listen effectively to each other they are more likely to cooperate with each other." In general, Fundamental Assumptions are the justification for the effort. What do we expect the return to be on good employee communication?

Program Strategy

The first part of Program Strategy is to be certain that it is consistent with the Organization Assessment and Fundamental Assumptions that should underlie and guide it. A Corporate Employee Communication Policy includes assumptions and guidelines for the entire company.

Communication Guidelines

The first task under Program Strategy is to develop a set of Communication Guidelines. Guidelines begin to clarify who is accountable for

the various kinds of communication. They also suggest what kind of communication climate the organization is aiming for.

Communication Programs

In the next step you determine the actual media and other programs needed to carry on the organization's communication efforts. Such programs can be as modest as a single newsletter or they can encompass a wide variety of rather sophisticated media and non-media programs. In either case, the communication programs must really help to create the communication climate that your Communication Guidelines suggest is needed.

Content Strategy

Employees generally have a pretty good knowledge of events. The grapevine sees to that. What they have problems with is understanding the causes and issues which underlie the event. And that generally is what they want to know.

About the only way to give employees that information is proactive communication--communication about the basic issues in the organization that they need to understand to perform their work better.

Message Platform

The first step in your Content Strategy is to develop a Message Platform. A Message Platform is the handful of organizational issues which are crucial to the success of the organization's business plan. In this context an issue is a long-term challenge affecting the organization's prospects for success. Those issues need to be identified and defined as simply as they can be during the Organization Assessment. And then they have

to be converted into specific messages that become the basic content of communication programs.

Message Execution

Once the key issues are converted into a series of essential messages, the next step is to assure that those messages become the basic content of organizational communication. The various messages must be tailored to the employee audience and their information needs.

This approach gets employee communication away from its tendency to be mostly reactive to events. Instead it becomes a proactive process in which essential issues are communicated as early as possible and as often as possible.

Evaluation Process

The final piece of the Honeywell model is the Evaluation Process. How do we know whether or not the plan is working? What adjustments are needed to make it more successful? Some approaches to evaluating a communication strategy include ECCO analysis, focus groups, survey-feedback, interviews, and direct observation of events and media.

When working effectively, the Honeywell model identifies the organization's priorities. It focuses on what events mean rather than on their occurrence. It helps give people a sense of perspective. It can help foreshadow change and make it easier for people to cope with that change.

One of the basic ingredients of holistic approaches to implementing planned change is some kind of systematic approach to communicating about organizational change. The Figure entitled "A Model for Communication of Organizational Change," represents the approach developed by Huseman, Hayes,

and Alexander (1977)." Their model is integrated with Kurt Lewin's three-stage change model.[12]

During stage 1, initiation of organizational change, the emphasis in the model on <u>two-way</u> communication with the task environment is appropriate, since an organization needs to both scan its environment and try to influence it. Both activities yield information needed to determine what adaptations, if any, should be made. The "change initiation agents" selected by management in phase 2 normally employ a variety of communication practices to initiate, implement, and evaluate change.

Selection of a target group is the first communication phase of the implementation stage. The change agent should include in the target group representatives of all constituencies directly affected by proposed changes. It is hoped that targeted people will supply the change agent with accurate information about current perceptions of the situation, and during phase 3, will provide accurate feedback on the effectiveness of communication strategies supporting the change program. The guiding principle for implementation of a communication strategy is that those affected by the change should participate fully.

Evaluation of the organizational change process (stage 3) should be an ongoing activity that starts on day one. Regular feedback allows for modification of communication and change strategies along the way. Tracer studies can be used to identify who received how much information from what sources. Evaluation of the change itself is a major part of the OD process.

While a model for communicating organizational change is an essential part of a holistic approach to implementing change, such a model addresses only one of the four issues in strategic management--the cultural change issue. There are also rational, human resources, and political issues to be

considered. This is done by way of an integrated Organizational Learning and Change Model which appears in my latest book. Most organization development phase models do adequately address only the rational and human resources issues involved in implementing planned change.

The foundation for an integrated model is derived from Bullock and Batten's (1985) synthesis of eighteen OD phase models that were developed between 1947 and 1982.[13] They identified four generic phases that characterize most of the models reviewed: (1) exploration, (2) planning, (3) action, and (4) integration. Exploration involves becoming aware of needs; searching for assistance and resources needed; and developing a psychological (for example, commitment, trust, and openness) and economic (for example, fees and budget) contract between those needing assistance and those providing it. Planning consists of collecting data needed to diagnose problems, setting goals and priorities, and developing intervention strategies for review and approval by top management. During the action phase the strategies are implemented and their effects are monitored by an ongoing evaluation process. Integration, the last phase, leads to the institutionalization of changes, that is, they are fully incorporated into the system, becoming part of its policies, rules, procedures, and culture. Institutionalization involves: (1) withdrawal of external assistance (external consultants exit), (2) stabilizing changes so they function as part of the system, and (3) providing for continual learning and change. I added to the integrated model an action research model that illustrates how to facilitate organizational learning and how to make OD more future oriented and less linear. I incorporated the political dimension via Bateman's (1980)[14] model, the cultural/symbolic dimension via some guidelines for cultural change and the communication/organizational change model discussed

earlier. These component models are then joined to create the integrated model you see in Figure 11-2.

The key contribution of action learning is that it provides a means to engage in "double-loop" as distinguished from "single-loop" learning (Argyris & Schon, (1978;[15] Bateson, 1972).[16]

Single-loop learning involves detecting and correcting errors in a fixed context: there is no attempt to question, monitor, or change that context. For example, identifying and correcting errors being made on bank statements would be an instance of single-loop learning. Double-loop learning takes place in progress, that is, we examine the underlying premises which are guiding our actions while we are acting. For example, "electronic banking is faster and more accurate than teller-assisted banking." We don't wait for errors to emerge before intervening to adjust the system, but rather we continually monitor and adjust the system in terms of what our actions tell us about it. In this way, errors are prevented, and the system is under constant revision.

One important principle that guides action learning is that we cannot proceed in a linear sequence, because no matter what phase we are in, the continual monitoring and evaluation of ongoing actions may suggest that we loop back to an earlier phase, and elaborate, revise, or terminate action. This "looping back" is represented in Figure 11-2 by the double arrows between phases.

OD As A Political Process

There seems to be a developing consensus that acquiring and using power are essential to the success of OD interventions. Schein (1985) insists that "the effective change agent needs a power-oriented approach to achieve

organizational change objectives."[17] A number of writers include a political dimension in their OD models (e.g., Poza, 1985;[18] Sashkin et al., 1985;[19] Tichy, 1983[20]). The basic steps from Bateman's (1980) political OD model are integrated into Figure 11-2.[21]

OD As A Cultural/Symbolic Process

If you examine Figure 11-2 you will notice that communication is an integral part of all phases in the OD process, and that cultural factors like heroes, cultural impediments and helpers, transition rituals, and training in values must be considered if change programs are to be successful.

A number of writers advise us to add a cultural dimension to the OD process (e.g., Buono et al., 1985;[22] Sashkin et al., 1985;[23] Tichy, 1983).[24] Deal and Kennedy (1982)[25] describe organizational change - a form of "cultural transformation" and hold that managers' inattention to relevant cultural issues is a major reason why "file cabinets are full of ambitious plans gone for naught" (p. 164).

Deal and Kennedy list several "ingredients of successful change" that fit nicely into the OD phases outlined in Figure 11-2: (1) recognize an outside threat and put a hero in charge (exploration/initiation); (2) develop transition rituals (planning); and (3) build tangible symbols of new directions and training in new values and behaviors (planning/-implementation). I added "identify relevant cultural factors" (diagnosis); "evaluate impact of change on culture" (evaluation); and "incorporate changes into culture" (integration), because these concepts underlie most discussions of the cultural aspects of change.

In summary, I start with the OD model derived by Bullock and Batten (1985)[26] from their review of the literature, I add political and cultural/symbolic dimensions, and I incorporate action learning phases to

make the integrated model more dynamic. Providing for evaluation at each phase leads to two-way interaction between phases (as indicated by the double arrows in the figure).

There is increasing evidence that holistic approaches to planning, change, and leadership are immensely more effective than the segmented strategic management practices of most American organizations. By overlooking significant communication, action learning, cultural and political factors, and by analyzing strategy to death by splitting it into an incomprehensible mass of rational/technical details, failure is all but assured. Rosabeth Moss Kanter[27] has launched a scathing attack on American management's compulsion for splitting organizations and decisions into so many segments that unified action is impossible. Peters and Austin call it "analysis paralysis."[28]

In conclusion, rational strategic management models such as Pearce's[29] will be of little practical value unless they are supported by a communication strategy that facilitates both the development and implementation of corporate strategy. In addition to planning a Honeywell or Xerox Communication Strategy, change agents must also integrate the cultural, action learning, and political strategies that are essential to success. Here's the bottom line: if plans are to move from the filing cabinet to the marketplace, a holistic approach to planned change will be required.

End Notes

[1] Huseman, R.C., Hayes, M.A., Alexander, E.R., III. 1977. Communicating organizational change: A case study. In R.C. Huseman, C.M. Logue, and D.L. Freshley (eds.) Readings in interpersonal and organizational communication (3rd ed.). Boston: Holbrook.

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[4] Bolman, L.G. and Deal, T.E. 1984. Modern approaches to understanding and managing organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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[9] Pearce, J.A. II. 1981. An executive-level perspective on the strategic management process. California Management Review, 24(1), 39-48.

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[13] Bullock, R.J. and Batten, D. 1985. It's just a phase we're going through: A review and synthesis of OD phase analysis. Group and Organization Studies, 10(4), 383-412.

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[15] Argyris, C. and Schon, D. 1978. Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

[16] Bateson, G. 1972. Steps to an ecology of mind. New York: Ballantine.

[17] Schein, V.E. Organizational realities: The politics of change. Training and Development Journal, 39(2), 37-41.

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[20] Tichy, N.M. 1983. Managing organizational transformations. Human Resource Management, 22(1 and 2), 45-60.

[21] Bateman, T.S. 1980. op. cit.

[22] Buono, A. F., Bowditch, J.L., and Lewis, J.W. III. 1985. When cultures collide: The anatomy of a merger. Human Relations, 38(5), 477-500.

[23] Sashkin, M. et al. 1985. op. cit.

[24] Tichy, N.M. 1983. op. cit.

[25] Deal, T.E. and Kennedy, A.A. 1982. Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

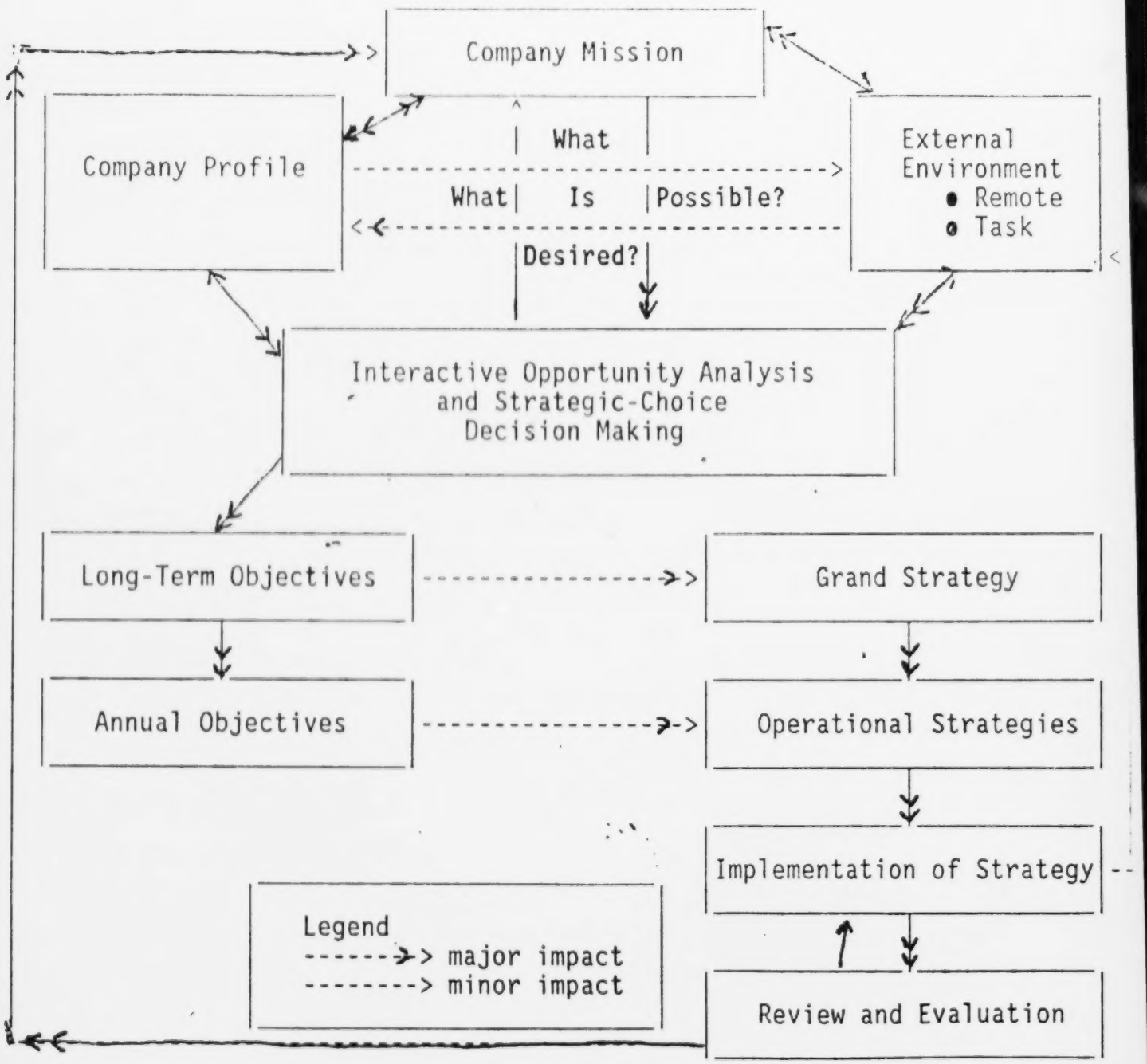
[26] Bullock, R.J. and Batten, D. 1985. op. cit.

[27] Kanter, R.M. 1983. The change masters: Innovation for productivity in the American corporation. New York: Simon and Schuster.

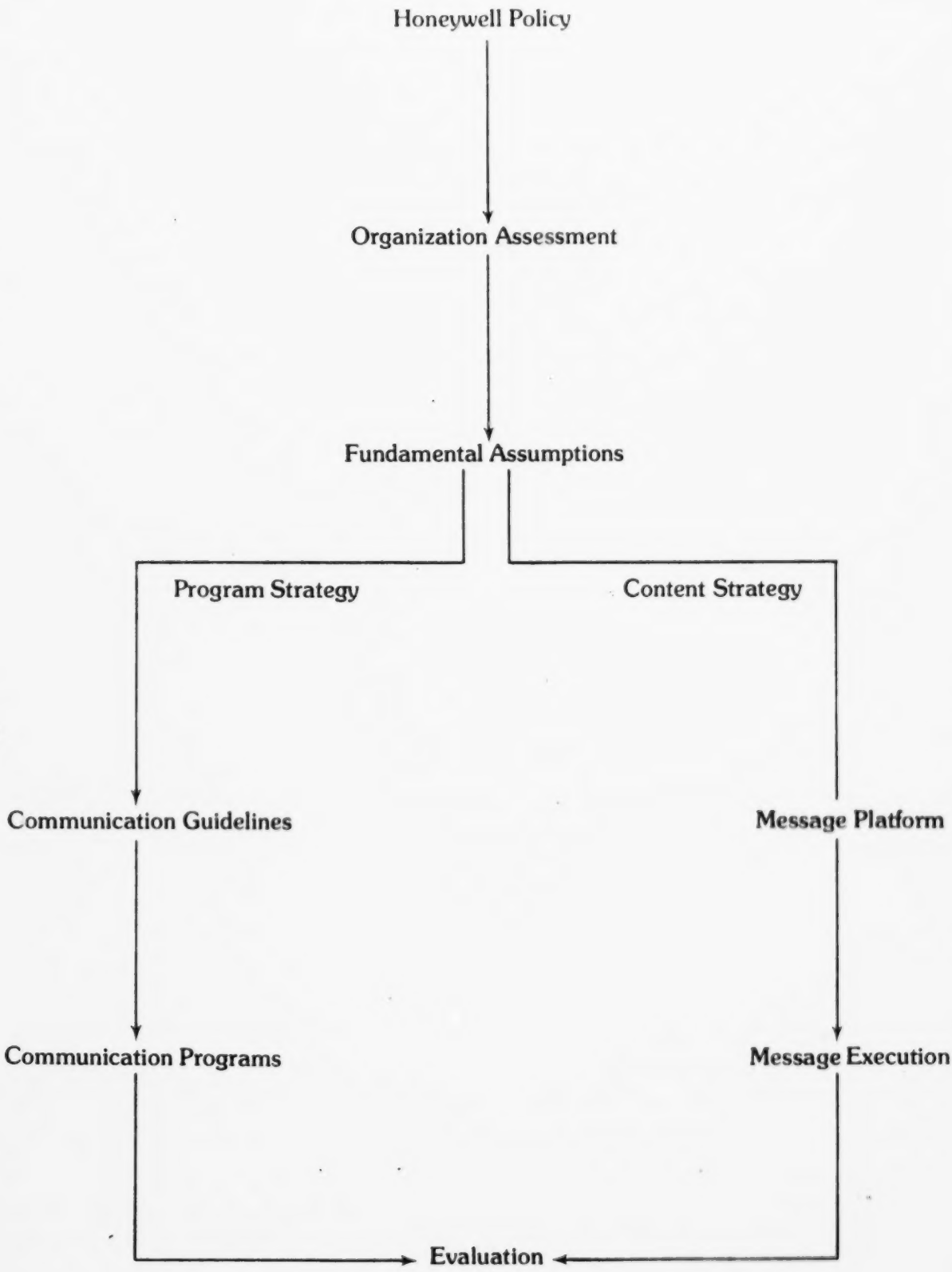
[28] Peters, T.J. and Austin, N. 1985. A passion for excellence. New York: Random House.

[29] Pearce, J.A. II. 1981. op. cit.

Figure 1. Strategic Management Model



From: J.A. Pearce, II, "An Executive-Level Perspective on the Strategic Management Process," California Management Review, 1981, 24 (1), p. 40. Use with permission.


Honeywell Policy
Organization Assessment
Fundamental Assumptions
Program Strategy
Content Strategy
Communication Guidelines
Message Platform
Communication Programs
Message Execution
Evaluation

gure 1. A Model for Communication of Organizational Change

STAGES OF THE CHANGE PROCESS	COMMUNICATION DIMENSIONS OF THE CHANGE PROCESS
Stage 1 Initiation of Organizational Change	Phase 1 -- Two-way Communication with the Environment Phase 2 -- Change Initiation Agents a. Internal b. External
Stage 2 Implementation of Organizational Change	Phase 1 -- Selection of a Target Group Phase 2 -- Gathering Information about Current Perceptions Phase 3 -- Developing Communication Strategies Phase 4 -- Implementing Communication Strategy
Stage 3 Evaluation of the Organizational Change Process	Phase 1 -- Effectiveness of Communication Strategies Employed in Implementing Change Phase 2 -- Effectiveness of the Change Itself

om Richard C. Huseman, Merwyn A. Hayes, & Elmore R. Alexander, III, ommunicating Organizational Change: A Case Study." In Richard C. Huseman, l M. Logue, & Dwight L. Freshley, Readings in Interpersonal & Organizational mmunication, 3rd ed., Boston: Holbrook Press, 1977. Used with permission.

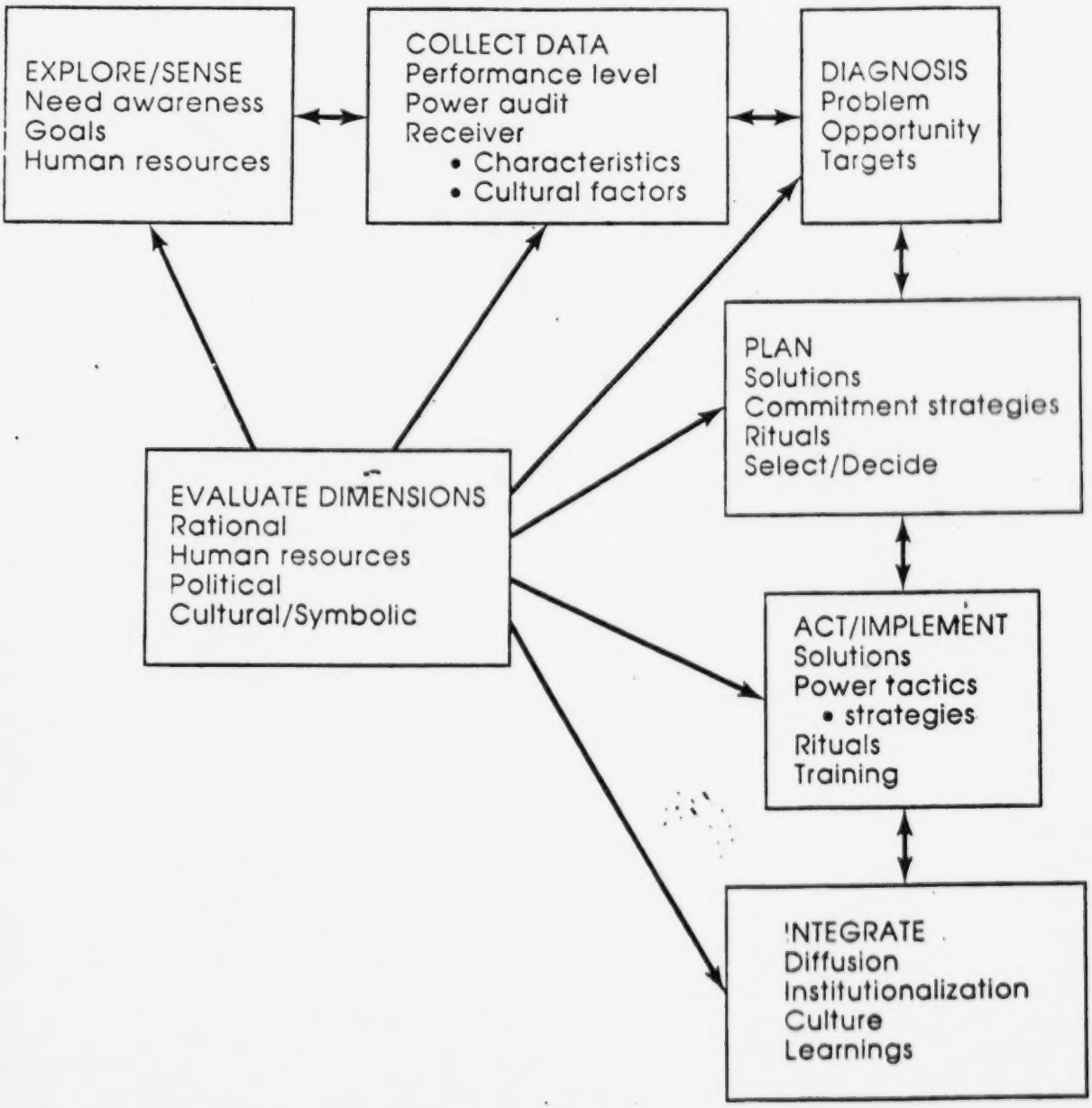


FIGURE 11-3 An Integrated OD/Learning Model

Figure 11-1. Four Dimensions of an Integrated OD Model

Synthesized OD Dimension (Bullock & Batten, 1985)	Action Learning Dimension (Susman & Evered, 1978; Frohman, Sashkin & Kavanagh, 1976)	Political Dimension (Bateman, 1980)	Cultural/Symbolic Dimension (Adapted from Huseman, Hayes, & Alexander, 1977; & Deal & Kennedy, 1982)
EXPLORATION	PRE-DIAGNOSIS	FORMULATE POLITICAL GOALS	INITIATION
Need Awareness	Scouting		Two-way communication with environment
Search	Entry		Select change agents
Contracting			Put a Hero in Charge
PLANNING	DIAGNOSIS	POWER AUDIT	IMPLEMENTATION
Diagnosis	Data Collection		Gather information on Current Perceptions
	Data Feedback	IDENTIFY INFLUENTIAL TARGETS	Select Target Group
	Identify Problem/ Opportunity		Determine Relevant Cultural Factors
Design	ACTION PLANNING	DEVELOP COMMITMENT PLAN FOR TARGETS	Develop Communication Strategies
	Alternatives for Problem Solving/ Opportunity		Develop Transition Rituals
Decision			
ACTION	ACTION TAKING	POWER TACTICS	IMPLEMENTATION
Implementation	Select Course of Action		Use Communication Strategy and Rituals
	Act		Build Tangible Symbols
	EVALUATING	RESULTS MONITORED	Train in New Values and Behaviors
Evaluation	Study Consequences of Action		EVALUATION Communication Strategy
			Impact of Change on Culture
			Change Program
INTEGRATION	SPECIFYING LEARNING		INTEGRATION
Stabilization	Identify Learnings		Incorporate Changes into Culture
Diffusion	Generalize to other situations		